PROSPECT,

OR

View of the Moral World,

BY ELIHU PALMER.

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Comments on the sacred writings of the Jews and Christians: Genesis, chapter 22d.

BEFORE we proceed to examine the matters contained in this chapter, which will be found upon examination to be very reprehensible, it will be proper to make a single remark upon a passage contained in the preceding chapter; it seems that Abraham and Sarah his wife, at a very advanced period of their existence, being then about one hundred years, became the parents of a son, whom they called Isaac, and the child grew and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned. (Verse VIII.) And what if these good old people weaned their baby when he was big enough to wean, and if they made a feast or a frolic upon the same day; what have all these domestic circumstances to do with religion, with the word of God, or with revelation? Was it necessary that the relater of this domestic anecdote should be inspired in order to tell it? Is there any thing supernatural or divine, in weaning a child or making a feast? If those who repose such special confidence in this book, and who are determined that it shall be called a Revelation from God, would take the trouble of examining what it contains, they must see that it is made up in a great measure of trifling stories, of no manner of consequence to any living mortal.

The twenty-second chapter contains a story of a very wicked and unnatural kind; it merits serious condemnation from every upright and intelligent mind. It begins in the following manner.—"And it came to pass, after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham, and he said, here I am. And he said, take now thy son, thine only *son* Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into te land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."—If all the immoral and

contemptible qualities which this book ascribes to the Creator, were collected together, and presented in one point of view, there would be formed a picture of wickedness not surpassed by the Alexanders and the Neroes of antiquity. God, it is said, did tempt Abraham to go and perform an action against which all the virtuous sentiments of the human heart revolts. The devil is called the old tempter, and according to the belief of christians, he goeth about for the purpose of tempting and deceiving mankind. Is God to be placed upon a par with the devil, and the same kind of conduct ascribed to him? But he not only tempted him, he also according to this account, gave a positive command to Abraham to go and kill his own son. Here opens a scene of injustice, cruelty, and inhumanity, which ought to stamp this book with eternal infamy. What, God himself laying a positive injunction upon a man to violate all the paternal affections of the human heart, to draw the murdering knife upon his own son, and subvert the very foundation of those tender attachments, by which families are united in the bonds of peace and friendship! The real God of the universe, is a God of perfect justice and universal benevolence; the God who gave this murdering command, must therefore have been a very different kind of a being, and the religion that is founded upon this corrupt theism, cannot be the religion of reason and truth. The bloody system of sacrifices, whether those sacrifices consisted in offering up brutes, or human beings, is proof positive upon the face of the record, that the theology by which they are sanctioned is not of divine origin. God cannot be pleased with such ferocious deeds; he cannot delight in the carnage of his creatures, it is the homage of a virtuous mind, it is the performance of actions which comport with a pure and incorruptible morality, that can alone become acceptable to him. To say that he ever gave this command to Abraham, would be to strip him of the attributes of mercy and of justice, and reduce him as low upon the standard of goodness, as imperfect man himself. If ever Abraham made an attempt of this kind, it must have been the effect of bloody and ferocious fanaticism, a fanaticism that triumphs over all the sympathetic affections of the human heart, and brutalizes the character of man. Such a command God never gave—such an action man should never commit. The book in which such mandate is found, and such actions are recorded, is exposed to the severest reprehensions, by the voice of reason and of humanity.

We find by further attention to this account, that Abraham was also guilty of deception, and that he concealed the truth from his son. When arrived at the fatal spot where this

bloody tragedy was to be acted, Isaac with solicitude observes. "Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt-offering." Abraham, as if conscience convicted, evades a direct answer by declarig that God would provide a lamb for the purpose. After all the parade and preparations, in this business, it seems that the bloody order was countermanded; an angel appears, and arrests the murdering hand of Abraham. But this does not mend the matter, for the command and the intention to obey, has marked the character of Abraham and his God with an indelible stain. But christian believers say all this was done for the trial of Abraham's faith; was God then ignorant of the true state of Abraham's mind, and was it necessary to play off such a farce to ascertain the truth? The angel says, for now I know thou fearest God; and God knew it before whether the angel did or not.

Abraham, however, still thirsted for blood; when he found he was prevented from murdering his son, without any fresh command for slaughter, he hunts about in the bushes for some object on which he could commit violence; at last he discovers an old ram, and at him he goes with savage cruelty. Something says he must die; without the shedding of blood my soul will never rest. This is the true spirit of the thing, and in this manner was the father of the faithful gratified in his blood-thirsty desires. This immoral business closes by a promise of reward on the part of God, that he would bless Abraham for what he had done, and that in him should all the families of the earth be blessed. Fine compensation for such wicked, such murdering designs! The God who holds in his hands the destinies of the universe, is incapable of such detestable transactions, and the book which contains them cannot be a revelation dictated by his wisdom and his goodness.

REVELATION.

If we examine the component parts and the structure of human existence, it will not be difficult to perceive the source and inlets of all our ideas and all our knowledge. The powerful agents that surround us, the universe which we behold, act with constancy and with force upon the senses of men. It is the relationship subsisting between sensitive and intelligent life on the one part, and the material world on the other, that forms the natural basis of all science, and the diversified improvements which society has been capable of exhibiting. Religious fanaticism, is, however, never contented to see things as they are, but possesses an eternal desire for moral and theo-

logical distortions. Bigots always pretend to hate the world in which they live; they sigh and groan for some unknown paradise, of which, however, they can give but an imperfect account, but where, however, according to their dreams and visions, they are to live in a continual state of idleness, and sing loud Hallelujahs to the Lord forever. This enthusiastic spirit by which supernaturalists are so much influenced, blinds the human understanding to all clear views of the nature of man, and the causes by which his faculties are expanded. The maxim in the scripture, *set your affections on things above and not on things upon the earth*, has turned the heads of thousands and withdrawn the human attention from those objects to which it ought to have been devoted. Whoever lives perpetually in the clouds will never do any good upon earth. Wherever the holy ghost absorbs all the tender and sympathetic affections, it is not to be expected that such a being will be capable of benevolent emotions to his species. If man would study his own nature, and understand his true predicament in life, he would cease to wander after phantoms, he would reject with just indignation religious impositions, whether they came in the name of Jesus or Mahomet, whether they were sanctioned by the bible or the koran, the Sadder or the Zendavesta. Revelation is a system of juggling, in which each dexterous impostor plays off a game of folly or fanaticism to accumulate interest, or gratify the enthusiastic feelings of the heart. Among inspired ideots there is also more of pride than is generally imagined, he who elevates himself to the third heavens, and there holds divine conversation with God himself, must have no contemptible opinion of his own dignity; but sometimes in the delirium produced by religious enthusiasm, he sinks as much below the standard of manhood, as his fancy had taught him to believe he had been raised above it. There is an intellectual insanity attached to those who run after religious ideas of a supernatural kind: Paul became so delirious in this case, that he did not know whether he was in the body or out; he was at a loss to determine at one time, whether he was inspired or not inspired; for he says, *and I think also that I have the spirit of God.* He had some doubts in the case; he thought he was inspired, but he was not quite certain: if in some instances he doubted it himself, we have a right to doubt of him in all cases whatever. By what evidence, can we at this distance of time be convinced that he ever was inspired, when it was evident upon the very face of the record, that he was under the influence of doubts and indecision in those cases where he felt the strongest impressions, how can we be certain that it was any thing more than the strength of his own imagination. It is well

known that this is a powerful source of error, and leads frequently to the most foolish and the most fatal delusions: there can be no method by which one man can prove to another that he has been inspired; the case does not admit of proof, for a transferable revelation is nonsense.

If the matters contained in the old and new Testament be brought to the true criterion, it would be found that they do not partake at all of the character of revelation. An excellent writer, *(Paine)* has more than once observed in his writings, that history is not revelation, for as he very justly observes, if a man has said or done a thing, it requires no revelation to tell him that he has said or done it; if the knowledge of the fact be communicated to others down through successive generations, this transmission can never be considered in the light of revelation from God,—it is mere historical detail, and however dignified with the name of holy writ, must forever remain at the standard of its own true character.

The greater part of the Old Testament, is a mere jumble of stories, bloody stories, too many of them by far too bloody, to possess the sanction of the most high God; intermingled with these scenes of human carnage, are several love intrigues, such as those of David and Solomon. These two royal wretches, these splendid debauchees of antiquity, have been dignified by the christian church with appellations of the most honorable nature, the one is said to be the wisest man, and the other a man after God's own heart; their transactions, however, with their female companions, are destitute of all the features of divine revelation. In short, the whole class of facts and of falsehoods contained in the old Testament, sinks into nothing, when we reflect that a revelation is something communicated from the Creator to man, by means of divine or supernatural power.

The precepts contained in the bible, whether moral or immoral, are surely not entitled to the name of revelation; no one will contend in favor of the first class, that is the bad precepts, and as to the second class, that is the good precepts; these are also destitute of all the characteristic features of a supernatural communication from the creator.

Moral principles are plain, simple rules, by which the conduct of man ought to be regulated; they grow out of the powers and relationships of human beings, they are deducable from the structure of man's existence, and reason is the power by which they are discovered and applied to the important purposes of human life. But there is a third class of ideas contained in the christian religion, to which believers especially annex the name and character of revelation; in this are included all the mysterious doctrines of the new Testament, such as atone-

ment, regeneration, doctrine of the trinity, &c. The answer to those who contend upon this ground is very short and easy. The doctrines are all either unjust or unintelligible, and in either case they cannot be called divine revelation. God will not reveal that which is unjust, and to reveal th.t which is unintelligible would be of no use—it would be a revelation unrevealed, it would be a revealed mystery which is no revelation at all, but it will perhaps be said that the position which has been laid down is wrong, that these doctrines are neither unjust, nor unintelligible; but we affirm that the doctrine of the atonement is unjust, because it sacrifices innocence at the shrine of vice; the doctrine of the trinity, christians themselves do not pretend to understand, they only pretend to believe it, because they think it is heresy not to believe it; the doctrine of regeneration is as little capable of being understood, it is a mysterious change that nobody can give any account of; Jesus himself was puzzled with it, for when Nichodemus asked him how a man could be born again, he evades the enquiry, by saying, the wind bloweth where it listeth, we hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh, or whether it goeth, so is every one that is born of the spirit."—That is in plain terms, I do not know any thing about it! Christian believers are therefore invited to point out the parts in the old or new testament, which deserve to be called a revelation from God, and give us some better proofs than those of tradition, that their system is true and divine.

COMMUNICATION.

THE church tells us that the books of the old and new Testament are divine revelation, and without this revelation we could not have true ideas of God.

The deists, on the contrary, say, that those books *are not* divine revelation, and that were it not for the light of reason, and the religion of deism, those books, instead of teaching us true ideas of God, would teach us not only false but blasphemous ideas of him

Deism teaches us that God is a God of truth and justice. Does the bible teach the same doctrine? it does not.

The bible says (Jeremiah, chap. 20, v. 7) that God is a deceiver. "O Lord (says Jeremiah) thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived. Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed."

Jeremiah not only upbraids God with deceiving *him*, but in chap. 4, v. 9, he upbraids God with deceiving the people of Jerusalem. "Ah! Lord God! (says he) surely thou hast

greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, ye shall have peace, whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul."

In chap. 15, v. 8, the bible becomes more impudent, and calls God, in plain language, a *liar*. "Wilt thou, (says Jeremiah to God) be altogether unto me as a liar and as waters that fail."

Ezekiel chap. 14, v. 9, makes God to say—"If the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, *I the Lord hath deceived that prophet*." All this is downright blasphemy.

The prophet Micaiah, as he is called, 2 chron. chap. 18, v. 18, tells another blasphemous story of God.—"I saw, says he, the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, who shall entice Ahab king of Israel to go up and *fall* at Ramoth Gilead? And one spoke after this manner and another after that manner. Then there came out a spirit (Micaiah does not tell us where he came from) and *stood before the Lord*, (what an impudent fellow this spirit was) and said, I will entice him. And the Lord said unto him, wherewith? and he said, I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And the Lord said thou shalt entice him, and thou shalt also prevail; go out and do even so.

We often hear of a gang of thieves plotting to rob and murder a man and laying a plan to entice him out that they may execute their design, and we always feel shocked at the wickedness of such wretches; but what must we think of a book that describes the Almighty acting in the same manner, and laying plans in heaven to entrap and ruin mankind. Our ideas of his justice and goodness forbid us to believe such stories, and therefore we say that a lying spirit has been in the mouth of the writers of the books of the bible.

T. P.

OF SUPERSTITION AND ATHEISM.

FROM PLUTARCH.

PLUTARCH in his Treatise on Superstition undertakes to prove, that atheism, though an opinion false and stupid, is far less hurtful to men than superstition. He explains superstition to be the continual dread of a deity no less mischievous than powerful, which is the most odious character that can belong to any intellectual Being, and has given birth to those shocking notions, and dismal rites in religious worship that have either run men into atheism and exposed religion itself to contempt and ridicule; or made mankind the dupes of de-

signing knaves, and taught fierce bigots to exercise and then sanctify the most inhuman barbarities.

"The atheist," says Plutarch, "knows no God at all; the "superstitious none but what is monstrous and terrible; mis- "taking for dreadful what is most kind and benificent, for ty- "rannical, what is truly paternal, for mischievous, what is full "of providential care; nay, for a being brutally savage and "fierce, what is perfect goodness itself. Shall then the atheist "be accounted impious, and not this superstitious person much "more so?

"I, for my part," continues Plutarch, "had rather men "should say there is no such person as Plutarch, than that he "was a man unconstant, fickle, prone to anger, ready to revenge "himself on the slightest occasion, and full of indignation of "mere trifles, &c.; yet this is no more than what the superstiti- "tious think of the Deity, whom, of consequence, they must "hate as well as fear. They worship, indeed, and adore him; "and so they do even those tyrants they would be glad of an "opportunity to destroy.

"Atheism contributes not in the least to superstition; but "superstition having given out so hideous an idea of the Deity, "some have been frightened into the utter disbelief of any such "Being, because they think it much better, and more reasona- "ble there should be no Deity, than one whom they see more "reason to hate and abominate than to love, honour, and reve- "rence. Thus inconsiderate men, shocked at the deformity "of superstition, run directly into the opposite extreme, athe- "ism, heedlessly skipping over true piety, that is, the golden "mean between both."

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